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## St. Louis-area lawmaker seeks removal of radioactive waste from Bridgeton landfill

By JIM SALTER Associated Press  
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<http://www.dailyjournal.net/view/story/212bf221eff544ac88d1068f66627983/MO--Bridgeton-Landfill/>

ST. LOUIS — A suburban St. Louis lawmaker on Monday called for the removal of nuclear waste from a landfill near Lambert Airport, citing concerns about an underground fire nearby.

Underground smoldering at the Bridgeton Landfill in St. Louis County has for several months created a foul odor. In March, Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster filed suit against the landfill owner, Republic Services Inc., citing violation of state environmental laws.

Bridgeton Landfill is part of the larger West Lake Landfill. Another area of West Lake contains nuclear waste from Cold War era work performed in St. Louis in the 1940s.

The underground fire is believed to be about 1,200 feet from the radioactive waste. State Rep. Bill Otto, a Democrat from neighboring St. Charles, said that's too close for comfort. He said the public would be endangered if the nuclear waste caught fire because contamination could become airborne.

"You cannot take the chance," Otto said. "This fire has a potential of reaching this radioactive waste. We cannot sit and wait and see if the fire is going to reach it."

"This community has been put through enough," Otto said.

Officials with the Environmental Protection Agency have said the nuclear waste is not endangered by the underground fire, and if it gets closer plans are in place to keep the nuclear waste from igniting.

The EPA does have provisions for emergency removals, spokesman Chris Whitley said, but only when people are immediately exposed to contaminants. Length of exposure and costs are other factors. "None of those criteria apply here," Whitley said.

The EPA is still weighing how best to remediate the site. An original cleanup plan called for leaving the waste on-site, covering it with rocks, clay, fill dirt and vegetation, and installing monitoring wells for groundwater. After an outcry from residents and politicians, the agency agreed to reconsider. A new plan isn't likely until 2014.

Meanwhile, efforts to reduce the smell problem at Bridgeton Landfill continue. Republic Services last week completed work to remove concrete pipes that were allowing the smell into the air. Now, a plastic cap is being installed in hopes of further cutting down the smell. The cap is expected to be in place by Labor Day.

The smell from the landfill has been so strong at times that residents have been hesitant to leave their homes and a hospital put up signs explaining the stink.

Health concerns have also been raised. Air testing by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources in February showed a potential short-term risk from high levels of hydrogen sulfide, and previous testing showed benzene levels near the landfill's property line that would be unhealthy with long-term exposure.